

Social Justice and Regeneration Committee

SJR(2)-17-06(p.8)

Date: Wednesday 6 December 2006

Time: 09.30am – 12.30pm

Venue: Senedd, Cardiff Bay

Agreed minutes from The South Wales Central Regional Committee

The South Wales Central Regional Committee

Minutes (SWCRC 03-06)

Meeting date: Friday 10 November 2006

Meeting time: 10:00 am – 12.30pm

Meeting venue: Soar Centre (Soar Ffrwdamos Chapel), Tylacelyn Road, Penygraig CF40 1JZ

Assembly Members in Attendance

Assembly Member	Constituency
Leighton Andrews(Chair)	Rhonnda
Lorraine Barrett	Cardiff South and Penarth
David Melding	South Wales Central
Jenny Randerson	Cardiff Central
Owen John Thomas	South Wales Central
Leanne Wood	South Wales Central

Others in Attendance

Name	Representing (if applicable)	Agenda item(s)
Cheryl Emery, Manager, Housing Advice Centre	Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council	3

Sarah Wynn, Senior Social Worker, Housing Advice Centre	Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council	3
Deborah Jones, Chief Executive	Voices from Care	3
Mathew Taylor, Training Development Officer	Voices From Care	3
Pam Clutton, Child Services Manager, Merthyr Partnership	Barnardos Open Door	3
Sam Austin, Operational Director	Llamau	3

Committee Service

Name	Job title
Vaughan Watkin	Committee Clerk
Karl Gomila	Committee Support

Item 1: Welcome

The Chair called the meeting to order welcomed the Members and the Public to the magnificent Soar Centre which was the operations base for Valleys Kids. It had been opened officially by The First Minister the Rt Hon Rhodri Morgan AM on the 30 June and the work on the centre had been funded through various sources including the Assembly Government, the Welsh Development Association and with funding from the European Community. Another Assembly investment, the second phase of the Ark project, would be opened later in the day at Tonypany by Edwina Hart the Minister for Social Justice.

1.2 It was usual for the local Assembly Member to say a few words of welcome the Chair indicated that he would do it from the Chair. He said that a lot of good work was taking place in the Rhondda with new roads being built together with the new hospital but there was also a downside with the threat to 300 jobs at the nearby Burberry Factory. The Chair thanked all the political parties for their support in campaigning to keep the factory open. He was pleased to see a good number of young people attending from Treorchy Comprehensive School and Tonypany Community College as well as some residents from Tylorstown. It was encouraging to see that the public had come to see the Assembly at work. Before moving on to the issue for discussion the Chair dealt with some housekeeping issues.

1.3 The Chair informed the meeting that all mobile phones should be turned off together with any other electronic equipment. Headsets were available for translation from Welsh to English and in the event of the need to evacuate the building, that they should follow the instructions from the Ushers and the Police and assemble outside the building.

1.4 The Chair advised the public that presenters would be invited to make their presentations and after a short break members of the public would have the opportunity to ask questions. There would be a designated break during the meeting where refreshments would be available for both the Committee and members of the public.

Item 2: Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

2.1 The Chair indicated that apologies for absence had been received from Christine Chapman, Sue Essex, Jonathan Morgan and Rhodri Morgan.

2.3 As there were no declarations of Interest the Chair moved on to the main business which was to look at Youth Homelessness.

Item 3: Youth Homelessness in the South Wales Central Region

3.1 The Chair explained that the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee were carrying out a Review of Homelessness in Wales. It was important that the regional committees engaged with issues across the constituencies. This was one of the reasons for the committee looking at youth homelessness in South Wales Central which would take evidence and submit it to the Chair of the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee in respect of their review of their review of Youth Homelessness in Wales. Presentations would be made by Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council, Voices from Care, Barnardos Open Door Rhondda Housing Association and Llamau. There would then be a short break after which Members and the public would have the opportunity ask questions.

3.2 The Chair welcomed Cheryl Emery and Sarah Wynn to the meeting and invited them to make their presentation.

Cheryl Emery said that her work as Manager of the Centre was to advise on homelessness and other housing related issues The Centre had dealt with 170 young people presenting themselves as homeless between November 2005 and September 2006. The problem was difficult to identify as it was a hidden problem as many youngsters did not contact the statutory agencies and their homelessness became a problem because they were either sleeping rough or sleeping on friend's floor or sofas. Sarah Wynn indicated that her work was based on working with 16/17 year olds and to assess their needs and to prevent them from becoming homeless if at all possible. Cheryl and Sarah went on to explain the various elements that resulted in homelessness. These included lacking a normal home life, social exclusion and deprivation of basic necessities such as food, clothing shelter and health care. There were many reasons for homelessness including abuse, mental health problems, family conflict and poverty. These issues could lead to poor health, low income, lack of suitable accommodation and criminal activity. The centre could offer a stable supportive environment for youngsters which could provide them with stability until such time as they were able to make their own way in life. A copy of the Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council presentation can be found at Annex 1.

3.3 The Chair welcomed Deborah Jones and Mathew Taylor from Voices from Care to the meeting and invited them to make their presentation.

Deborah Jones said that between a quarter and a third of homeless people in the UK have spent time as children in the care system. Almost 50 per cent of Voices for Care workload involved leavers from care at the age of sixteen. Many youngsters faced problems well after leaving care and sometimes up to the age of twenty five and her colleague Mathew would explain some of the problems young people faced when they left care. There were often communication problems between the various statutory bodies in respect of youth issues which had to be addressed as lack of self esteem often had care leavers moving into prostitution and drug use. Youths leaving care were often bounced backwards and forwards between the statutory agencies such as social services, health and education departments and there had to be a more across the board communication between these bodies in order to operate a corporate parenting role to ensure an effective outcome for those who were homeless. Mathew Taylor said those youngsters who leave the care system are sixty times more likely to be homeless, fifty times more likely get into trouble with the police and eighty eight times more likely to turn to drug use. Many did not have any family support or social workers to help them with their problems. At sixteen youngsters leaving care were expected to find their own accommodation which often needed to be redecorated, find jobs and learn to manage money. They were expected to grow up very quickly which was difficult in many cases as the average age for leaving home in normal society was around twenty three. These young people were very vulnerable within society and this was a major issue.

Other points raised by Deborah and Mathew were that youngsters should realise that they had a right to a standard of living that was good enough to meet their physical and mental needs, have access to health care and be recognised by the statutory agencies as having such rights. Key recommendations from Voices from Care were to review housing arrangements for care leavers; a joined up approach when allocating housing; the provision of the correct type of support when needed; priority to be given to the most vulnerable cases who were often leavers from care at the age of sixteen. A copy of the Voices from Care presentation can be found at Annex 2.

3.4 The Chair Welcomed Pam Clutton from Barnardos Open Door to the meeting and invited her to make her presentation.

Pam Clutton said that homelessness for care leavers was a barrier to training and education but surely this was the way forward. The fact that resources were limited did not help the situation. Another problem was the inequality of access for young people as provision of services was better in some areas. Statutory bodies should be developed according to need. If placed out of area it was more likely to have a detrimental effect. Many care leavers were placed in bed and breakfast accommodation which was not really suitable because there was no support provided. However they could not be placed in hostels for eighteen year olds because of the various risk factors involved. Many families did not have the capacity themselves to provide help and support. There was a huge emotional effect on the young when they were made homeless and their confidence had to be built up in order for them to progress. Many statutory services were spread out over large areas it would be good to see a provision of services in one place as experienced in Rhondda Cynon Taf C.B.C. Youths who were homeless needed to be in a place of their own, provided at a reasonable rent, close to home which was safe and the accommodation in good condition. It was essential that they could contact

somebody to talk to and to give advice. The main issues were lack of adequate financial support, lack of accommodation and the lack of appropriate support from the statutory authorities. A copy of the Barnardos presentation can be found at Annex 3.

3.5 The Chair Welcomed Gayna Jones from the Rhondda Housing Association to the meeting and invited her to make her presentation.

Gayna Jones said that the Rhondda Housing Association was a Registered Social Landlord working only in the Rhondda Cynon Taf Council area. The Association dealt with social housing issues for those young people on housing estates and the for those leaving care and owned or managed around 1450 homes many of them in areas of deep seated deprivation. It was likely that many of the homeless young people of the future were now living in the communities that the Association was currently working with. The main function of the association was to provide housing for people in need including vulnerable young people to help them maintain their tenancies and by community development projects. These projects included partnerships with others including the Valley Kids Play Bus, the Young Builders Trust and Step by Step Advocacy. The Rhondda Housing Association as a landlord has a vested interest in the success of deprived communities as many of the potential homeless young people of the future are currently living in those communities. The Association had routes into areas of deprivation which it used to deliver community development intervention to help break the cycle of deprivation which could and often did lead to young people becoming homeless. A copy of the Rhondda Housing Association presentation can be found at Annex 4.

3.6 The Chair Welcomed Sam Austin to the meeting and invited her to make her presentation.

Sam Austin said that many of the points that she would have raised had already been mentioned so she wanted to look at what should happen in the future and also give examples of good practice used by Llamau which was a homeless charity delivering services to the vulnerable socially excluded homeless and potentially homeless people in South Wales for the last 20 years. Youth homelessness was preventable if the proper support and advice was available. Family relationship breakdown was a huge issue in this areas and it should be realised that this could happen to anyone but it was more likely within a poor background or to those with low education standards. However it was not impossible to get out of the situation with the proper support. The fact that 16/17 year olds could not access mental health care if they were not in school was a disgrace and there was a huge gap in the system which she hoped the Welsh Assembly Government would do something to redress as soon as possible.

She welcomed the changes made to the priority needs groups made by the Welsh Assembly Government but there was still too much generic provision rather than specialist provision and this what worked for young people. Some homeless services let young people down as they may be placed inappropriately which could lead to more problems. The Single Room Rent discriminates against young people and the lack of young people rough sleeping does not mean that there is not a homelessness issue. Research has shown that the best outcomes for young people at risk of homelessness are a flexible individual programme which pays attention to young people's personal needs with a high priority being given to their feelings and views of their needs. Llamau has become

a "provider of choice" because of its ability and reputation for working with all young people and providing high levels of support to individuals to help them achieve the skills to live independently and integrate within their communities. Llamau was not a statutory agency, but it should be noted that it had many years of expertise specifically with high need young people and it should be emphasised that Llamau liked young people. Working in partnership with the statutory agencies was crucial to success but all things considered the best place for a young person to be was at home as long as it was safe and that parents are willing to listen and understand issues raised. Joint working had improved over the years but there is still a long way to go as there was still an increase in the numbers of young people made intentionally homeless for their behaviour at home. Young people were being required to leave B&B accommodation by Landlords and this might be considered as being made intentionally homeless in some areas. There was a need to invest in services to young people through the expansion or development of targeted youth homelessness services. A copy of the Llamau presentation can be found at Annex 5.

3.7 The Chair thanked all the presenters for their interesting view which had raised a number of issues some of which were the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly Government others for Local Authorities and other statutory bodies and some for the Government at Westminster. The Chair invited questions from Members and the public.

Assembly Members and public's questions to the Panel

- Leanne Wood AM asked a numbers of questions which were as follows:
- Was there still a night shelter in Pontypridd how many people did it cater for and what was the level of provision;
- The presenters indicated that there was a problem with care leavers leaving care at sixteen so should there be statutory provision after sixteen and if so to what age;
- The issue of age discrimination was raised in respect of the benefit system with regard to the single room rent. The Assembly would have new powers after May next year so would the presenters like to see legislation enacted to exempt young people.
- Deborah Jones mentioned private foster care in England and the outcomes achieved; how could we make the system in Wales more responsive to peoples needs;
- How easy did the presenters think it would be to re-house young people who were evicted for anti social behaviour and were subject to ASBO's and should eviction be prevented in respect of those under eighteen years.
- Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council was currently examining the issue of Stock Transfer; how can we ensure that youth homelessness does not increase should stock transfer proceed;
- Presenters indicated that they did not want homeless shelters which would bring an influx of single young people into their areas; what could be done in respect of this issue;
- Presenters said that there was a problem in the way young people were seen in society and they were often shown in a bad light; how could we change the tone of the debate on this issue;
- Lorraine Barrett AM asked two questions which are as follows:
- Family mediation has been mentioned by all the presenters; what do your individual organisations do in respect of this issue;
- How do you see the involvement of GP's in helping young homeless people;

- David Melding AM asked if there were any areas of best practice that the presenters could suggest and was there a need for an All Wales Housing Association for Care Leavers.

Owen John Thomas AM indicated that the Huggett Centre in Cardiff had informed him that many of the people sleeping rough did not want to stay at the centre because they were not willing to abide by the rules of the centre; surely there should be somewhere where everyone should be able to find a place to sleep; what were the presenters views on this issue;

In response Sam Austin made the following comments. Llamau worked with care leavers and the Care Leavers Act had gone some way to help. However there was still a lack of consistency in some local authorities and how they implemented, resulting in problems arising when the services were overstretched. It would be helpful if the Welsh Assembly Government could make changes in respect of the Single Room Rent policy once they had extra powers following the elections in May 2007. In respect of ASBO's it would be better if under 18 year olds were exempted from being evicted as it was not always the young that caused the problem on the estates when they had been placed their under supported housing schemes.

Stock Transfer had caused problems for Llamau initially as in some authorities little property was made available for those having a priority need although the situation had improved recently. It was essential that partnership working was put in place before a Stock transfer took place.

The not in my back yard scenario (NIMBYISM) was a problem because in many areas local people had shown hostility to the provision of hostels in their areas. Llamau had responded by reminding the communities that these were their young people, and by holding consultation exercises with community before applying for planning permission for any new hostels. It all came back to corporate responsibility, and it would be helpful if all local authorities had a Homelessness Champion to help break down barriers within communities and to challenge planning application refusals in local authority areas. In respect of discrimination of young people in many cases the press and the media were at fault as they would rather show the negative side of an event rather than the positive. In some areas it was often the older residents who were causing the problems and not the young.

Getting young homeless people on a GP's Register was also a problem in some areas and Llamau sought out those GP's who were sympathetic and this was working well with many young people being able to access medical care immediately.

Mediation within families did work but the parents and children had to communicate with each other and recognise the problems. There were many examples of best practice throughout Wales including the mediation services, the work carried out by Rhondda Cynon Taff at its Housing Advice Centre, the supported housing projects in a variety of settings and in different areas. The possibility of an all Wales Care Leavers Association would be complicated to set up and it would be better for all those organisations involved to accept that young people were not such a problem and to accept that at times they would need support. The Huggett Centre in Cardiff was a different issue as it took older people rather than young persons. In most cases young were willing to accept rules as long as they were reasonable.

Gayna Jones said that the public often demonised young people in society and this should be a concern for everyone. ASBO's were a preventative measure but not a cure. Often an ASBO was the only appropriate way forward but surely it would be better to work with those youngsters in order to find some common ground. In respect of the issue of Stock Transfer the Rhondda Housing Association and the Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC had a joint waiting list and housed from that list. This system would still be in place with any new organisation should the Stock Transfer Scheme proposed by the Council proceed. Family Mediation services were extremely useful and the Rhondda Cynon Taf area has a Community Mediation Service and also a Neighbourhood Mediation Service which helps to deal with problems which may arise before they got out of hand.

Pam Clutton said that there was a gap in support for Care Leavers in respect of education issues. If a leaver was in education, support would be provided until age 25. If not in education only to age 21 and this element had to be addressed as at 21 young persons were making progress, but in some cases still had emotional problems which impacted on their problems especially in respect of tenancy issues and still should be able to access ongoing support. Private Fostering worked well in the private sector because of the networks of support to help them. Private foster organisations could refuse to take a difficult youngster whereas the statutory authorities had no choice in the matter. It should also be mentioned that the funding still came from the same source and many of the carers were former staff of the local authority but had been poached by the private firms offering more money. The preventative agenda was important because of the need to engage with youngsters and their families. However the recent Data Protection Act had caused some problems as consent forms from the parents were now required to enable the youngsters to access services that were available. The Act was good in its way and necessary but it could in some instances create barriers to care facilities. Any access to parenting advice should be as diverse as possible in order that the services could be used but it was difficult if parents did not know how to access such services. If there was no support for youngsters in the first instance larger problems could be the result in the future. Registration with a GP was another problem and in many instances GPs had to be forced to place youngsters on their registers for a certain length of time. Access to the surgery was also difficult for youngsters as often one had to telephone at specific times for appointments which were not always convenient. In respect of best practice perhaps we should examine the standards in place. Everyone should know what was available to them and be able to relate it to the right of access to the young but in many authorities this information did not exist or was not available.

Deborah Jones in response to the questions called for statutory duty to young persons to be extended to the age of 25 years. Advocacy did not always support the young people adequately because those representing the young people were being funded by the local authorities. This resulted in certain cases the child not being properly represented because of divided loyalties. It was recognised that the Child Commissioner was originally tasked with helping those young people living away from home or who were in care. She believed that this remit had slipped down the agenda. The Children's Commissioner should consider championing good practice for young people in care. Another concern related to foster care as several social work directors had indicated that outsourcing foster care was not sustainable and over the years had created a deficit in the budgets. Social Services needed to construct good quality provision within house rather than outsourcing it to the private sector. There was also a problem with accountability when problems arose and this should be examined. She wondered whether all private foster care was provided for the benefit of the young persons or whether private foster provision in some cases was driven by financial gain. In respect of local

authorities the Waterhouse Report recommended that local authorities offered

Robust residential and foster care services but these were on the decline and whilst some residential centres suited older young persons these were also on the decline and action should be taken to rectify the situation.

Cheryl Emery in response said her authority had moved on from the night shelter in Pontypridd and now provided a purpose built direct access hostel in the centre of Pontypridd for rough sleepers but it was normally full all the time. There were good GP links with the hostel and it was now normal practice to get single homeless young people onto a GPs list with out a problem. The authority did have restrictions on access to certain hostels because of the vulnerability issues in respect of 16/17 year youngsters; however the authority now had a five bed direct access hostel for single vulnerable youngsters. She felt really positive about stock transfer schemes in the authority because there were robust nomination arrangements in place. RCT worked with all the local housing associations currently and these organisations were also on all the sub groups that met to discuss housing issues. There was no reason to believe that this process would change in the future. In respect of best practice the authority had learned a lot and had made great strides in this area. The Housing Advice Centre was a visible one stop shop and was not hidden away. Any youngster who came to the centre was interviewed immediately by a Homelessness Officer and then referred to a Mediation Officer with a view to getting the youngster back home if possible. If that was not the case Sarah would work with them to unravel the complexities of the benefit system and either attempt to get them back home or into the YMCA in order to avoid placing them in bed and breakfast accommodation at all costs.

3.8 The Chair thanked them for their responses and then asked for questions from the audience.

Ken Palmer from Mountain Ash said he was a helper at a youth club and Chair of a local residents association and he saw the problems of youth homelessness on a daily basis. Youngster had great difficulty accessing the system. One example was of a 16 year old youth who was homeless and even after 25 phone calls to ten RCT departments and six voluntary organisations he was still on the streets later that day and it took five days before he found a place to stay. He felt that the voluntary associations could work better together to avoid only part of the problem being dealt with. It was for the Government in Cardiff Bay and in Westminster to do something about the problem of youth homelessness and the time to do it was now.

Darren Day the local authority Support People Manager made a plea for funding and the requirement to link the work of the different organisations together as all of them were worthy causes but funding must be put into a preventative agenda in order to avoid young people becoming homeless.

Margaret Jarvis, Director of Valley Kids said that the real key to the problem was prevention and to try and prevent the problems arising at an early stage and community development was essential to the process. Good practice should be having an effective preventative process working in order to address the problems of youth homelessness.

3.9 In summing up the Chair Leighton Andrews said that the session had been extremely useful and

good evidence had been received across the board about the various problems including the lack of the joined up nature of the service provision and the difficulty of accessing provision in different areas because of different rules and regulations. The interaction between the benefits system and housing, social services and other health services should be examined and the huge emphasis on dealing with the preventive end of youth homelessness should be addressed. It was also noted that education expectations of those coming out of care were being depressed and the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee may wish to look into this area. There were also concerns in respect of legislation issues particularly the Data Protection Act which caused the voluntary organisations some problems and ways had to be found to resolve these problems. There were many examples of good practice these should be noted and taken on board by all the organisations involved.

The Chair indicated that twenty years ago he had been the UK Campaign Director of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless and many of the issues raised then were still with us today and one of those had been the issue of bed and breakfast accommodation. The issues of homelessness and housing were not simple issues and were affected by different factors which in turn affected homelessness and housing issues.

Item 4: Date of next meeting

4.1 The Chair indicated that Members had been asked whether there was need of a further meeting and as there were none this would be the last meeting of the committee until after the elections in May 2007.

4.2 The Chair thanked all the presenters and Members together with the audience for their contribution to the meeting. He also thanked the staff of the Soar Centre for all their help and assistance in facilitating the meeting.

Committee Service, November 2006